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ABSTRACT

Englewood Learning Center in Chicago provides programs for severely and profoundly handicapped children (5 to 17 years old) in an urban area where many families live in subpoverty conditions. The program requires families to be involved in the individualized education program process and in the whole range of educational services. The program relies on a behavior management system using a token economy and progression of limits. The therapy program combines elements of psychotherapy, reality therapy, gestalt, play therapy, family, and behavioral therapy. The administrative style promotes group sharing, respect, and independent thought. (CL)

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STRATEGIES THAT ADDRESS INTERNAL & EXTERNAL BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONING

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In complying with the least restrictive environment and continuum of services components of public law 94-142, the Chicago Board of Education contracts with private providers to meet the educational needs of severely and profoundly handicapped children. These providers are generally non-profit corporations; which administer day school and/or day treatment programs. They are often referred to as "therapeutic or special schools". Each special school usually focuses on meeting the needs of a specific population, differentiating by age and handicapping condition.

Englewood Learning Center, provides programs for trainably and educably mentally handicapped/emotionally disturbed children, learning disabled/emotionally disturbed children and severely emotionally disturbed children including schizophrenic and autistic students, ages ranging from 5-17.

Although, each student and each family is unique, they all share common factors which influence the experience we provide. These factors are:

1. Ninety percent of the families we serve have subpoverty level incomes. Consequently, many live in congested, violent, unsanitary public housing or substandard "slum areas".

2. All of these families have had multiple experiences with local educational and/or mental health agencies. Based on observations and statements from families, these experiences are generally overwhelming at best, usually debilitating.

3. Family structures are spastic, illdefined or virtually nonexistent.

As a result of these factors, upon referral our students and their families are often afraid, hostile, dependent, self-destructive, distrustful, unorganized and have fully internalized failure. Our entire millieu is organized to reverse these outcomes. If an agency, program or person focuses on the magnitude and depth of the issues just mentioned or dares considering other factors such as the effect of the welfare syndrome, racism, diets and environmental pollutants surely they will be overwhelmed. In keeping with objectives of this conference, this paper is devoted to providing practical information and awareness of issues over which we have immediate control. Each program component is preceeded by a brief rationale explaining considerations affecting our development of that component.

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Facility; Healthy people build, buy, rent and decorate dwellings which represent their taste, style, needs for security, openess, in essence self. Our clients are often born, raised, educated and treated in unkempt, dirty, dull nonfunctioning structures. The effects of these settings are predictable and evident; lack of motivation, poor ego development, low creativity, high levels of fear, etc., etc. The condition of an educational facility also imparts a message to students and parents about the level of concern for them, influences their level of attendance and influences their control of behavior.

Consequently, we begin our re-education by locating our program in a functional building in the community and insuring that it is clean, bright and safe. These conditions are requisite to developing pride, personal hygiene and a respect for property.

Intake Interview; Waiting in lines, taking a number for an interview and being greeted by an indifferent interviewer are common experiences for black poor clients who depend on government sponsored programs for satisfaction of health care, educational and financial needs. Certainly if one were designing a system for insuring a positive initial contact these elements would all be removed.

At Englewood Learning Center, our intake interview is not very unlike that of other agencies, we take the family on a tour, get a social history, do some screening, have the student visit possible classrooms and insure students and parents are appraised of services we provide and cooperation we demand. We also make every effort to insure that the family feels welcome, understood and respected. This is done by offering coffee, speaking with, not at clients, using familiar versus clinical or other jargon, structuring the interview to maintain its focus and being honest about space availability, acceptability and expected outcomes of involvement in the program.

Program; A key sentence which highlights our interactions with students and families is contained in the preceeding paragraph. WE PROVIDE SERVICES AND MAKE DEMANDS! Welfare agencies, schools, social service agencies and other major institutions that affect Blacks and are controlled by Whites often provide minimal or patchwork services. Because their expectations are for Blacks to fail and remain dependent, they make virtually no demands and set very low competency and achievement standards for Black families and students. Because we are a school, our involvement with families is structured by the child's interaction with the program. The needs of the student dictate the amount and type of family involvement. Major components of the school program follow with explanations of family involvement in each.

I.E.P.; As mandated by P.L. 94-142 each special education student must have his/her progress reviewed and have a new I.E.P. developed. It also mandates that parents be involved in both processes. The extent of that involvement is often critical to parents understanding and support of the program. Therefore, we insist a parent or their representative participate in this process. Before presenting our perspective of the child's progress and defining goals we request the parent to identify changes their child has made and what changes they desire for the future. We present our perspective and iron out differences. In the process we develop "co-workers", people who also have some investment in the success of attaining the goals defined in the I.E.P.

Transportation; Excluding a few older students, our children are bused to and from school. There are just two rules that need to be followed by parents if children are to arrive at school safely and on time. The rules are simple; 1)parents must be present when children are picked up and dropped off; 2)buses can not wait longer than three minutes for students. Due to environmental and internal conditions, complying with these simple rules is often difficult for families. Through the interaction that takes place in teaching and overcoming parental resistance to these rules we are able to introduce and stress important concepts such as consistancy, scheduling and group vs. individual priorities.

Assessment; On going assessment is essential to maintaining relevant programs for students. Certainly we rely on standarized achievement test, psychometric test and other accepted diagnostic tools. We also solicit information from parents on an ongoing basis. Again this encourages them to accept some ownership for effecting services, allows us an opportunity to collect information on the current family status, allows us to how a family perceives the student and often produces useful diagnostic information.

Education; Our academic, behavior management, physical education, Project Responsibility and therapy program components entwine to aid students and their families minimize handicaps and overcome multiple failures and rejection which have become a way of life. Other expected outcomes are for students to become motivated and experience pride in achievement. All the basic elementary school subjects are taught at Englewood; often using novel and multifaceted approaches which also teach children how to share, develop confidence, how to manage anxiety and how to have fun.

Utilizing assessment date we develop a picture of a child's learning style, his strengths and weaknesses. We use this information to involve the child in an academic program which guarantees success by starting him/her at their mastery level and gradually building from there. This in itself, often has a positive effect on the child's status in the family. For once the child and family get to hear some positive things about the child's performance. Accomplishments are rewarded in school and emphasized in communication with the parents. To motivate and tap into traditional strengths of rhythm and auditory discrimination possessed by many black children, teachers utilize techniques such as "multiplication clap" an exercise for mastering arithmetic facts, improve listening skills and make math enjoyable. Singing is used to increase listening skills, increase oral expression and again have fun. "Magic Circle" is a program through which kids learn to recognize that all peers have strengths. common problems, how to express feelings and how to share. Because many of our children have low receptive and expressive language skills, we utilize the "T.A.L.K." program through which students strengthen communication skills by engaging in fun, competitive experiences stressing language related activities such as rhyming, categorizing, coding and story telling. Students learn to communicate confidently, lessening their need to express themselves by physical acting-out.

Gross and Fine Motor Coordination, eye hand accuracy, perceptual motor skills are but a few skills developed via our physical education program which is based on Project Active a compentancy based P.E. program designed to assure participation and success of students regardless of the severity of handicap or lack of skills. P.E. is taught daily because it is also an excellent medium for teaching social skills and aiding the development of self-confidence.

These are only a few techniques and programs used in the school. They work, parents see their children progressing, which is why we can make demands. Demands to attend parent conferences, have kids ready on time and participate in family therapy if it's needed. Of course things do no always go smoothly. Kids get into fights, are truant or late and sometimes make no attempt to progress. Rather than accept total responsibility for these things, we involve families, sometimes asking them to be more encouraging, more forceful, structured or tolerant. Naturally they are not always cooperative or have the skills to do what we ask. Again rather than view these situations as reasons to accept failure, we use them as opportunities to involve, teach and support families.

Due to miseducation adoption of inappropriate coping patterns and the lack of development of internal controls, many of our children manifest inappropriate behaviors, which hinder their ability to learn and constantly result in their being rejected by authority figures, peers, etc....

To assist children in learning new behaviors, coping patterns and to insure successful experiences throughout their environment, we have developed a behavior management system. The behavior management system utilizes a token economy and progression of limits. These are keyed by clear communication, consistency and a recognition that behavioral problems decrease significantly when sutdents are involved in well planned activities geared to their abilities. For succinctness I will not belabor you with details of this component. It does work, student's behaviors change, consequently when we ask parents to employ these techniques at home they are usually anxious to try them.

In today's society children who do not succeed in school are considered failures. There are no family businesses or low skill jobs through which our youth can prove their self worth. Because our kids are handicapped, they have been treated as if they always need help to the extent that they seldom think of helping others. Fortunately the area immediately surrounding the center is densely populated by senior citizens. Through Project Responsibility, we provide services for senior citizens and develop a medium through which we create situations to provide alternative avenues for children to be proud, help others, understand different age groups, achieve and earn money. Of course, becoming a member of Project Responsibility, is tied into school achievement and maintaining behavioral expectations. Children involved in Project Responsibility often use money earned to buy their own clothes or help the family economic situation. In either case this usually enhances their worth within the family and sometimes they become models for the family.

Our therapy program employs psycho-thearpy, reality therapy, gestalt, play-therapy, thera-play, family therapy, behavioral therapy, combinations of all the above, individually and in groups. Therapy is focused on remediating problems identified via assessment and through interacting with students and their families. Because it is very difficult to effect internal changes in clients without effecting some changes in the environment or at least teaching new strategies for coping with it, therapy and social work are combined. It is a lot easier to effect some internal changes in parents after assisting them increase welfare allotments, find decent housing or get a job. In order to do this, clients are seen not only in the office, but in their homes and throughout the community.

Staffings; To coordinate efforts, keep staff members aware of the current status of children, evaluate treatment and plan, each student is reviewed monthly by all personnel involved with that child. Each staff member must submit a written report. There is no chief (person who makes decisions on future plans) controlling staffings and each person's perspective is equally respected. Decisions and recommendations are made via consensus.

Administration; In order to effect the type of program outlined it is necessary to utilize an administrative style which promotes group sharing, respect and independent thought. You must insure that adequate monie are available to provide skilled, stable staff and other program necessities. This means you have to be aware of and have the expertise to secure funding from all available sources public and private. Much concern must also be given to employee morale and continually upgrading employee skills.

In summary we are effective because we are;

1. Aware of student and family needs.
2. Aware of environmental, political and economic systems affecting out clients.
3. Plan to insure success.
4. Use areas of friction to interact, teach and learn.
5. We respect and recognize strengths of all families.
6. Make students and parents shoulder some responsibility for growth.
7. Employ a wide range of educational and therapeutic models to meet the differing needs of our families.
8. Utilize a review process that insures communication and coordination of services.
9. Employ administrative models which promote behaviors which will enhance positive staff involvement with families.
10. Work hard to obtain sufficient funding.
11. Believe each and every student and parent is capable of achievement and growth.

MLA;yd
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